



The **VR** *Advantage*



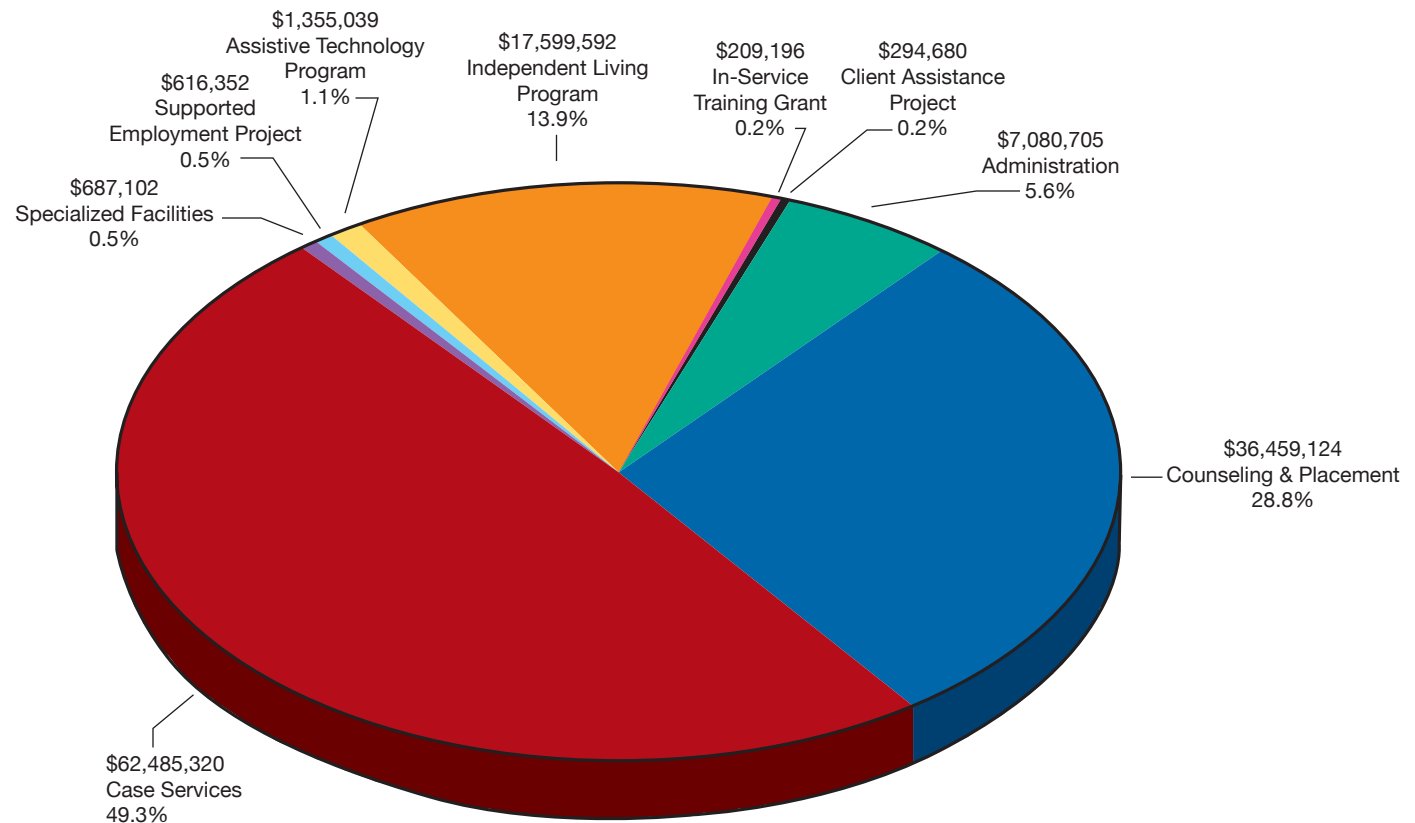
2005-2006 Annual Report
North Carolina Division of
Vocational Rehabilitation Services



Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Summary of Expenditures of Funds

North Carolina State Fiscal Year 2005-2006



■ Administration	\$7,080,705	■ Counseling & Placement	\$36,459,124
■ Case Services	\$62,485,320	■ Specialized Facilities	\$687,102
■ Supported Employment Project	\$616,352	■ Assisted Technology Program	\$1,355,039
■ Independent Living Program	\$17,599,592	■ In-Service Training Grant	\$209,196
■ Client Assistance Project	\$294,680		

Source: Chief Accountant, Fiscal Services 11/06

VR in Fiscal Year 2005-2006: A Time of Renewal

In fiscal year 2005-2006, Vocational Rehabilitation's organizational change initiative – begun two years before – forged ahead full-throttle with concrete results in a wide range of agency pursuits. Drafted as the framework for change, our organizational values embraced renewed commitment – to a service mindset as the foundation for success; to balancing regulatory compliance with providing valued outcomes as perceived by our customers; to limiting regulatory burden on direct-service staff and external customers; to evidence-based decision-making; and to a high-involvement and performance-based culture.

Hands-on, agency-wide work groups became crucibles of change, researching, debating and crafting new approaches and recommending new effective practices – all with the aim of producing an even more effective and responsive provider of services to people with disabilities.

These groups surveyed, reviewed, and put forth new ways of doing things in the areas of customer service, cultural

diversity, employment services, external and internal communications, strategic staff development, performance management, the policy-making process, and client-referral management.

Also in 2006, VR central administration's organization chart and offices got a new look. State office physical improvements followed a realignment of office staff to reflect new organizational directions. New sections – Policy Development and Outreach and Program Policy, Planning, and Evaluation – recombined ongoing and new functions.

Much of the year's momentum flowed from a fresh commitment to the dual customer approach which reaffirms VR's founding concept and continuing mission – assisting people with disabilities in becoming qualified employees of our second set of primary customers, their employers. Reflecting this renewed thrust is the title change of our job placement specialists to business relations representatives who, more than just placing applicants, have renewed their emphasis on building relationships with employers and offering a range of support services that position the agency as the employer's primary resource for disability-related issues in the workplace.

The Year By The Numbers

- *VR assisted 8,405 North Carolinians in achieving successful employment outcomes.*
- *Independent living objectives were achieved by 2,271 Independent Living program participants.*
- *Assistive Technology provided 9,402 individuals with consultation/information services.*
- *Disability Determination expanded to 93.8 percent the portion of its cases handled by electronic filing.*



Vision Statement

At VR, our vision for those we serve is that one day soon: "North Carolinians with disabilities will live and work in the communities of their choice with economic and other supports available to help them achieve and maintain optimal self-sufficiency and independence."



Linda Harrington
Director,
N.C. Division of Vocational
Rehabilitation Services



Director's Message

To North Carolinians with disabilities, VR can be many things. Many of those we serve benefit from a range of services to assist them in finding employment or achieving their independence, but the VR umbrella extends beyond these more familiar offerings.

This report is intended to reflect what we are - and it is dedicated to those whose commitment make us who we are: our staff; our partners at the state, federal and local levels; the employers who've seen the advantage of working with VR; and those who've refused to let disability keep them from leading productive lives.

Our goal, of course, is to continue to provide better services - and provide services better - to our customers.

Increasing our successful employment outcomes is one area where we are bringing major, renewed emphasis. Though as old as vocational rehabilitation itself, we've begun a recommitment to the "dual customer approach," in which our staff intensifies VR's relationships with business and, in so doing, better positions VR as a premier resource for business on disability issues. One hoped-for result is increased opportunities for assisting our consumers with job placements.

A big step in this direction is the kick-off of "dual customer approach" pilot projects in six sites: Charlotte and Hickory in the west, Raleigh and Pinehurst in our central region, and Goldsboro and Washington in the east. In these places and others, we'll be building strategic alliances with businesses through our partnerships with local chambers of commerce, Joblink Centers, human resource managers associations, business advisory councils and other organizations.

We want to hear more comments like the one we received recently from JoAnna Williams with Atrium Windows and Doors in Davidson County: "VR has been an excellent business partner...They work hard to align individuals with job opportunities. We plan to continue this strong relationship as we grow."

At VR, we can and will develop the skills and relationships that lead to higher-quality and more successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities in North Carolina.

Evaluation and Counseling

VR provides services to people with disabilities to assist them in getting or keeping a job. Rehabilitation begins with an assessment of the consumer's strengths, skills and experience. Jointly developed by the consumer and counselor, each individual's plan for employment is carefully monitored and, if needed, adjustments are made. Plans may include: diagnostic services; physical and mental restoration; personal assistance; assistive technology; rehab engineering; transportation; modifications to vehicle, home, job and worksite; and others.

Among consumers who completed their rehabilitation plans in FY 2005-2006, VR provided –

- Assessment services to 17,115 individuals
- Diagnosis and treatment of impairments to 8,752
- Counseling and guidance to 6,526

Categories of services offered beyond the assessment stage are: employment services, rehabilitation technology, training, and personal assistance services.

Benefits Counseling

In North Carolina, the federal Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach initiative operates under the name Making Employment A New Success. Program specialists offer counseling to recipients of Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance to help them understand how going to work often has a less-than-feared effect on their benefits payments. For recipients of traditional VR services, the counseling has helped remove disincentives to seek employment.

- VR's MEANS program has served more than 5,500 Social Security beneficiaries since the program's inception in 2000.
- In September, the Social Security Administration awarded the program an additional three years of funding.
- The program is joined by similar initiatives under United Cerebral Palsy-Easter Seals, Life Plan Trust and Tri-County Industries to offer benefits planning assistance throughout North Carolina.





School-to-Life Services

VR has partnered with local schools across the state to assist students in making a successful transition from their school life to jobs and careers. Services are designed to assist individuals with disabilities – physical, mental or learning-related – who require assistance to prepare for, locate, or maintain employment compatible with their interests, skills and potential. For eligible students, VR offers vocational guidance and assistance with training, job placement and other services. Referrals may be made by a parent, teacher, social worker, guidance counselor or nurse, or an individual may refer himself or herself. In the past year:

- VR served 21,044 youth – 22 and under – with disabilities.
- 177 VR counselors provided services to clients in local schools in all 100 counties.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing

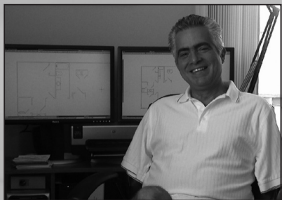
VR provides services to individuals who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or late-deafened to assist them in preparing for, getting, or maintaining employment. Counselors work with consumers to help

them make informed choices about their job goals and what, among a range of specialized services and equipment, is needed to help meet those goals. Located in 13 of VR's local offices, specially trained counselors assist citizens with hearing loss across North Carolina. In FY 2005-2006 VR:

- Provided services to 1,261 consumers with hearing loss.
- Helped 414 consumers with various degrees of hearing loss achieve successful employment outcomes.
- Began to equip seven local offices with advanced technology to improve consumers' access to services and their employment outcomes.

Employment Services

Getting or keeping a job is the main goal of the partnership between the consumer and VR. The process begins with evaluation of the consumer's interests, abilities and aptitudes for different kinds of jobs. The employment plan may include college or vocational training, on-the-job training, job coaching, or supported employment. VR staff often provide information on résumé preparation, interviewing, developing job leads, and assistance in locating a job.



After employment, the VR counselor and consumer stay in contact to help make sure the job is a good fit.

- Last year, VR assisted 8,405 North Carolinians in achieving a successful employment outcome.
- In FY 2006, consumers' weekly earnings before receiving services averaged \$52. After employment, the average – reflecting a range of earning levels and full - and part-time jobs – increased to \$282.
- Individuals employed after receiving VR services earned a combined total of \$2.4 million per week.

Services to Employers

Crucial to VR's mission are North Carolina's businesses who each year hire thousands of individuals served by VR. Because each of our referrals is screened, employers can feel more confident they're a good prospect for their company, and they appreciate services like customized follow-up and on-the-job training that can help make sure the new employee remains a good fit. For more than 80 years, VR has been the state's premier resource on issues related to disabilities in the workplace.

- Screening, job-matching and training can reduce employers' recruitment time and costs.
- Employers can benefit from on-site consultations by professionals like our rehabilitation engineers who help ensure that the physical workplace is a good fit for the new employee.
- Employers can benefit from these services at no cost. They may also enjoy tax incentives for hiring a VR referral.

Community Rehabilitation

VR is able to extend its services for people with disabilities through programmatic partnerships with dozens of community rehabilitation programs across the state. Community rehabilitation programs are equipped to offer a range of job-placement and support services to VR consumers with specialized needs. CRP services include: vocational evaluation; job development; job coaching; individual or group supported employment; and work adjustment activities designed to help individuals improve work skills, work behaviors, and emotional/physical tolerances for a range of jobs.





- VR directly administers two community rehabilitation programs – in Goldsboro and Morganton – serving eastern and western North Carolina.
- In FY 2006, 5,212 consumers received services from a community rehabilitation program.
- Of that number, 1,411 were successfully rehabilitated while many others continued to progress toward their employment objectives.

Supported Employment

VR consumers find themselves at many different stages in the types of jobs they prefer, the skills they offer, and their readiness for work. Many consumers benefit from more intensive support services in becoming acclimated to new employment or in remaining on the job. After placement, supported employment can mean job training at the worksite for as long as needed or a job coach to assist the employee on a longer-term basis – perhaps with daily, weekly or intermittent visits.

- In FY 2006, 3,910 consumers received supported employment services.
- Of that number, 1,028 were successfully rehabilitated while many

others continued to progress toward their employment objectives.

- Supported employment services may be supplemented by or directly provided by a local, VR-approved community rehabilitation program.

Independent Living

Independence can often mean living in the home and community of choice. To help its consumers achieve that end, the Independent Living program offers evaluation and counseling, vehicle modifications, peer counseling and advocacy, rehabilitation engineering, prosthetics and orthotics, personal assistance services, recreational therapy, and assistance with leisure activities. Independent living counselors and program participants jointly plan how to achieve a viable, cost-effective alternative to institutional living.

- In FY 2006, the Independent Living program assisted 6,334 individuals. Independent living objectives were achieved by 2,271 IL participants.
- Of that number, 411 individuals were either transitioned out of nursing homes or were able to avoid going into nursing homes.



- Personal care services were provided to 391 individuals at an average cost of \$8,922 per year.

Rehabilitation Engineering

With technology and a commitment to creative problem-solving, VR's rehabilitation engineers help consumers overcome physical barriers in a number of areas, including education, transportation, employment, independent living and recreation. Services can cover: adaptive computer access; augmentative communication; seating/mobility; and home, vehicle, and worksite modifications. Engineers often consult with employers to assist in removing architectural barriers so that new employees with disabilities or current employees who've acquired disabilities may be accommodated.

- In FY 2006, 1,440 barrier removal projects at consumers' residences were successfully completed.
- During the same period, 138 vehicle modification projects for consumers were successfully completed.
- In FY 2006, rehabilitation engineering projects completed for consumers exceeded \$4.4 million.

Assistive Technology

For people of all ages and disabilities, assistive technology devices can make everyday living more independent. Offering access in all 100 counties, VR's AT staff demonstrate how assistive technology can improve computer use, daily living activities, mobility, communication, education, leisure, alarm systems, and environmental controls. Assistive technology offers short-term loans for trying out devices, information/referral, rights advocacy for individuals and families, and financial resource information.

- In FY 2006, assistive technology provided 9,402 individuals with consultation and information services.
- AT staff made 4,284 equipment loans and conducted 778 demonstrations.
- The Fifteenth Annual Assistive Technology EXPO had 1,200 attendees.
- In 2006, AT conducted 710 training/awareness seminars for 17,783 attendees.





Disability Determination

Under an agreement with the Social Security Administration, Disability Determination Services receives applications from SSA offices across the state and adjudicates Social Security disability and Supplemental Security Income disability payments. Disability Determination Services performs the same function with Medicaid claims received from the state's county departments of social services.

- In FY 2006, DDS expanded to 93.8 percent the portion of its cases handled by electronic filing.
- The agency was certified to process claims in the fully electronic environment resulting in the elimination of the paper file as the official disability folder.



Client Assistance Program (CAP)

Client Assistance Program is a federally funded program that serves anyone seeking information, applying for services or receiving services from agencies receiving federal monies under the Rehabilitation Act. These include the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation,

the Division of Services for the Blind and the independent living rehabilitation programs within those divisions, as well as the state's Centers for Independent Living. Services include bridging gaps that may occur in accessing rehabilitation services, assisting with the appeals process and providing information and referral.

- Distributed brochures statewide to more than 70,000 consumers and professionals.
- The program provided information and referral to 929 individuals, and
- Provided outreach to 5,960 individuals in traditionally unserved or underserved populations.



VR 'All-Stars'

In 2006, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation honored staff members in Dunn, Durham and Raleigh with its fifth statewide VR All-Star Awards. The three were chosen from nine recipients of VR's regional Superstar Awards.

- **Leadership** – For outstanding achievement in leadership, the agency honored Angie Boyce, a quality development specialist in its Dunn office. Boyce was praised as “an excellent listener, role model, team player, creative thinker, organizer, planner and leader.” She was also cited for “providing quick and workable solutions” and “continuously promoting the VR vision and mission.”
- **Customer Service** – The agency honored Patsy Tilley, a now-retired lead secretary in its Durham office, for outstanding achievement in customer service. Tilley was cited for her “exceptional dedication to VR's customers, both internal and external” and her commitment and pride in her work which helped her “take on the most challenging customer situations without complaint and with a let's-get-it-fixed attitude.”
- **Creativity** – Freya Brannon, a computer training specialist in the agency's state office, was honored for her creativity. Brannon was recognized for making herself “invaluable to VR staff through her tireless ability to see the potential in using computer technology for daily work” and for “thinking beyond oneself to see the bigger perspective for the good of the agency.”

Director Linda Harrington thanked the honorees “for the many contributions you make to our organization and our state that are acknowledged with this award. Your professionalism and commitment to service remind us all of why we are here.”

Health and Human Services Secretary Carmen Hooker Odom congratulated the recipients for “all you have achieved for your colleagues and consumers. The distinguished service for which you've been recognized has been indispensable in carrying out our department's mission.”



Angie Boyce



Patsy Tilley



Freya Brannon

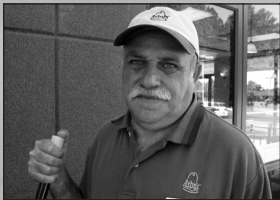


State Rehabilitation Council

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Kathy Brack
Ken Gregory
Mitzi Holmes
Richard Crews
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Ex Officio:

Linda Harrington, Director
Jim Saxon



State Independent Living Council

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Dennis Troy
Rebecca Williford

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Samuel Teruel-Velez
Cynthia Speight
Mark Whisenant
Gregory Best



January 2007

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January

February

Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)/Low Vision Awareness Month
American Heart Month
Muscular Dystrophy Awareness Month

March

National Brain Injury Awareness Month
Multiple Sclerosis Education & Awareness Month
National Developmental Disability Awareness Month

April

Alcohol Awareness Month
National Autism Awareness Month
National Fair Housing Month

May

Mental Health Month
Better Hearing and Speech Month

June

24-30 Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week

July

26 Americans with Disabilities Act Anniversary

August

September

National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month
16-22 National Rehabilitation Awareness Week
23-29 National Deaf Awareness Week
30-October 4 Southeast Regional Institute on Deafness

October

National Disability Employment Awareness Month
National Spina Bifida Awareness Month
31-November 2 NC Rehabilitation Association Conference

November

National Diabetes Month
National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month
National Epilepsy Awareness Month
29-30 NC Assistive Technology Expo

December

DHHS/North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services SFY 2006 Data Summary

Statewide Overview, Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Eligible Cases served in the SFY	50,927
Cases still developing Individualized Plans of Employment (IPEs) as of the end of the SFY	3,889
Consumers we served through Individualized Plans of Employment (IPEs)	47,038
Consumers still receiving services at the end of the SFY	29,857
Successful Employment Outcomes	8,405
Unsuccessful Employment Outcomes	8,776

Statewide Overview, Independent Living Rehabilitation Services

Number of Individuals Served	6,334
Consumers still receiving services at the end of the SFY	613
Successful Independent Living Outcomes	2,271
Number of individuals transitioned out of nursing homes or were able to avoid going into a nursing home	411
Individuals Receiving Personal Care Services	391
Average per person cost of Personal Care Services	\$8,922

Supported Employment and Work Adjustment

	Total Clients	Successful Outcomes	Unsuccessful Outcomes	Active Cases as of 6/30/06
Supported Employment	3,910	1,028	674	2,158
Work Adjustment	5,216	1,411	1,481	1,875

Successful Closures, SFYs 2004-2006

State Fiscal Year	Successful Outcomes	Number with Significant Disabilities	Percentage with Significant Disabilities
2004	8,898	5,483	61.62%
2005	8,788	5,395	61.39%
2006	8,405	5,305	63.12%

DHHS/North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services SFY 2006 Data Summary

NC Assistive Technology Program Overview

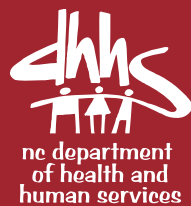
Activity	Number of Consumers
Consultation and Information Services	9,402
Equipment Loans	4,284
Assistive Technology Funding Resources Information	1,424
Number of consumers at the 710 Training and Awareness Seminars	17,783
Attendees at the "15th Annual Assistive Technology Expo"	1,200

NC Disability Determination Services Overview

Cases Received (FFY06)	128,142
Dispositions	134,063
Cases Pending (started FY06 with 32,588)	26,899
Average time (receipt to disposition) (National average = 93 days)	91.7 days
Performance/Accuracy Rate	96.8%

Earnings Data for Successful Closures

Average Earnings	Weekly Earnings	Monthly Earnings	Annual Earnings
Case Opening	\$51.58	\$223.51	\$2,682.16
Case Closure	\$281.66	\$1,220.53	\$14,646.32
Avg. Increase	\$230.08	\$997.01	\$11,964.16
Total Increase	\$1,933,784	\$8,379,730	\$100,556,768



N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

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Department of Health and Human Services • Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

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04/07